

# CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

<u>Project Name:</u> Morstad Break Request	<u>Proposed Implementation Date:</u> March 2013
<u>Proponent:</u> Steve Morstad, 406 Monroe St, Plentywood, MT 59254	
<u>Type and Purpose of Action:</u> State lessee, Steve Morstad, has requested to break up to 205.1 acres of expired CRP land on State lease #5398. The CRP contract for the referenced tract expired on September 30, 2012. Mr. Morstad wishes to now utilize the expired CRP acreage for small grain production.	
<u>Location:</u> 205.1 acres in the NE4, S2 of Sec. 36 in Twp. 37N – Rge. 54E.	<u>County:</u> Sheridan

## I. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED: Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.	<p>The proponent, Steve Morstad, submitted a break request in writing to the Glasgow Unit Office (GUO) of the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. The request will be reviewed per DNRC land breaking criteria for all lands other than native sod.</p> <p>MT FWP was solicited by the GUO for comment and responded on February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2013. FWP's was not opposed to breaking this specific tract; however, FWP is generally opposed to breaking of CRP lands that provide benefits to wildlife and recommends leaving 100m buffers around all wetlands and riparian areas. FWP understands the DNRC and lessee's best interest may be to break up expired CRP land. FWP also provided information regarding cost share programs offered by FWP to entice lessees/landowners to enroll lands into CRP. This information will be passed along by the GUO to lessees inquiring about enrolling/re-enrolling State land into CRP.</p> <p>NRCS and FSA will be involved.</p>
2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:	<p>DNRC is not aware of any other agencies with jurisdiction or other permits needed.</p>
3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:	<p>Action Alternative: Grant the proponent permission to convert 205.1 acres of expired CRP from permanent cover to small grain production.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Deny the proponent permission to convert 205.1 acres of expired CRP from permanent cover to small grain production.</p>

## II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

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RESOURCE	[Y/N] POTENTIAL IMPACTS
	<p>N = Not Present or No Impact will occur. Y = Impacts may occur (explain below)</p>
<p>4.GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:</p> <p>Are fragile, compactable or unstable soils present? Are there unusual geologic features? Are there special reclamation considerations?</p>	<p>Soils are primarily Williams loam and Zahill loam complexes which are considered class III and IV soil types and considered suitable for farming. Most of the soil types within the project area meet the DNRC's break criteria for lands other than native sod. Removing the permanent cover will make the soil more susceptible to erosion; however, the continuous cropping methods used by our lessee should minimize erosion. The proponent has agreed not to break areas that have steep slopes and are erosion prone; DNRC staff would meet with the proponent prior to breaking and flag off these types of areas. No unusual geologic features or fragile, compactable, or unstable soils are present.</p> <p>Action: Removing the permanent vegetation would increase the likelihood of soil erosion. If erosion resulted from this break, the proponent would be required, through DNRC stipulations, to reseed the eroding areas back to permanent vegetation. No impacts to the geology or soil characteristics are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the geology or soil characteristics will occur.</p>
<p>5.WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION: Are important surface or groundwater resources present? Is there potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality?</p>	<p>Small grain crop production would utilize the soils available water similar to the tame grasses that are present.</p> <p>Action: The project is not anticipated to impact the water quality, quantity, and/or distribution of surface water.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the water quality, quantity, and/or distribution will occur.</p>
<p>6.AIR QUALITY: Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the project influenced by air quality regulations or zones (Class I airshed)?</p>	<p>Action: No impacts to air quality are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to air quality will occur.</p>
<p>7.VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY: Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or cover types present?</p>	<p>FWP recommended a 100m buffer around drainages and seasonal wetlands. DNRC staff would make an onsite inspection and flag off any and all areas determined to be highly susceptible to erosion. No rare plants or cover types are present within the project area.</p> <p>Action: Vegetation cover would be altered from expiring CRP acreage (tame grass) to annually seeded cropland.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the vegetation cover,</p>

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	quantity, and/or quality will occur.
<p>8.TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:</p> <p>Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds or fish?</p>	<p>A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program identified 3 animal species of concern (Baird's Sparrow, Nelson's Sparrow, and Whooping Crane) and 3 potential species of concern (Hayden's Shrew, Brook Stickleback, and Brassy Minnow). No impacts to the listed species are anticipated to occur from the proposed action. Other wildlife in the area consist of whitetail deer, antelope, mule deer, upland game birds, song birds, migrating waterfowl, small mammals, amphibians, etc. The current stand of CRP grass is used for nesting habitat by bird species and as bedding, resting, and hiding habitat for the other wildlife. Removing the CRP would displace the animals into the surrounding landscape. The annual production of small grains would add a food source to the area.</p> <p>Action: No substantial impacts to terrestrial, avian, and/or aquatic life and habitats are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to terrestrial, avian, and/or aquatic life and habitats will occur.</p>
<p>9.UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES: Are any federally listed threatened or endangered species or identified habitat present? Any wetlands? Sensitive Species or Species of special concern?</p>	<p>A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program identified 3 animal species of concern (Baird's Sparrow, Nelson's Sparrow, and Whooping Crane) and 3 potential species of concern (Hayden's Shrew, Brook Stickleback, and Brassy Minnow). None of the listed species are anticipated to be impacted by the proposed action. No wetlands are located within the project area.</p> <p>Action: No impacts to unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources will occur.</p>
<p>10.HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES: Are any historical, archaeological or paleontological resources present?</p>	<p>Action: The acreage proposed to be broken has been disturbed in the past and does not contain any historical, archaeological, and/or paleontological resources.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the areas historical, archeological, and/or paleontological resources will occur.</p>
<p>11.AESTHETICS: Is the project on a prominent topographic feature? Will it be visible from populated or scenic areas? Will there be excessive noise or light?</p>	<p>The project area currently consists of a mixture of grazing lands, agricultural lands, and CRP lands. This project area is not near a prominent topographic feature, no excessive noise or light would be produced, and it is not visible from a populated or scenic area.</p> <p>Action: No impacts to the areas aesthetics are anticipated.</p>

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	No Action: No impacts to the areas aesthetics will occur.
12.DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY: Will the project use resources that are limited in the area? Are there other activities nearby that will affect the project?	<p>Action: No impacts to the demands of environmental resources such as land, water, air, and/or energy resources are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the demands of environmental resources such as land, water, air, and/or energy resources will occur.</p>
13.OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA: Are there other studies, plans or projects on this tract?	<p>Action: No impacts to studies, plans, and/or projects are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to studies, plans, and/or projects will occur.</p>

## III. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

RESOURCE	[Y/N] POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES
14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY: Will this project add to health and safety risks in the area?	<p>Action: No impacts to human health and/or safety risks are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to human health and/or safety risks will occur.</p>
15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION: Will the project add to or alter these activities?	<p>Action: No impacts to industrial and commercial activities are anticipated. Returning the expiring CRP acreage to agricultural production would result in increased small grain production.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the industrial, commercial, and/or agricultural activities and production will occur.</p>
16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT: Will the project create, move or eliminate jobs? If so, estimated number.	<p>Action: No impacts to quantity and distribution of employment are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to quantity and distribution of employment will occur.</p>
17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES: Will the project create or eliminate tax revenue?	<p>Action: The proposed action would increase tax revenue from the increased revenues generated from the lease being returned to production.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the state tax base and/or tax revenues will occur.</p>
18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES: Will substantial traffic be added to existing roads? Will other services (fire protection, police, schools, etc) be needed?	<p>Action: No impacts to the level of demand for government services are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the level of demand for government services will occur.</p>
19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS: Are there State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, etc. zoning or management plans in effect?	<p>Action: No impacts to local environmental plans and goals are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to local environmental plans</p>

	and goals will occur.
20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES: Are wilderness or recreational areas nearby or accessed through this tract? Is there recreational potential within the tract?	<p>Action: Hunting opportunities for upland game birds and deer may be impacted due to the removal of the tame grass stand. No other impacts to recreational or wilderness activities are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the quality of recreational and wilderness activities will occur.</p>
21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING: Will the project add to the population and require additional housing?	<p>Action: No impacts to the density and/or distribution of population and housing are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the density and/or distribution of population and housing will occur.</p>
22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES: Is some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?	<p>Action: No impacts to the areas social structures and/or traditional lifestyles are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the areas social structures and/or traditional lifestyles will occur.</p>
23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY: Will the action cause a shift in some unique quality of the area?	<p>Action: No impacts to the areas cultural uniqueness and/or diversity are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the areas cultural uniqueness and/or diversity will occur.</p>
24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:	<p>Action: No impacts to the social and economic circumstances are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the social and economic circumstances will occur.</p>

EA Checklist Prepared By: s/Matthew Poole/s  
Matthew Poole (Land Use Specialist)

Date: March 18, 2013

IV. FINDING	
25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:	Action
26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:	DNRC staff will meet with proponent to flag off areas that are unsuitable for farming and do not meet DNRC's break requirements due to soil class and slope%. These areas will be left in permanent cover and managed as either hayland or grazing land. No potential impacts are anticipated.
27. Need for Further Environmental Analysis:	
<input type="checkbox"/> EIS <input type="checkbox"/> More Detailed EA <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No Further Analysis	

EA Checklist Approved By: Clive Rooney NELO Area Manager  
Name Title

s/Clive Rooney/s Date: March 18, 2013  
Signature